

131 PRIORY STREET, CARMARTHEN: ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF 2012



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131 PRIORY STREET, CARMARTHEN: ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

Gan / By

Philip Poucher

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SUMMARY

The development of an Islamic Community Centre at 131 Priory Street, Carmarthen (NGR SN 41603 20358) involved the conversion of the existing street front property and the creation of new buildings in the plot to the rear. The site lies in the heart of the Roman town of Moridunum and in close proximity to an area of the town protected as a Scheduled Ancient Monument (CM234). A previous archaeological evaluation on the site (Poucher 2012) identified the survival of Roman-period archaeological remains lying beneath later post-medieval disturbance and soil layers throughout much of the rear plot. As a consequence, the foundations of the proposed works within this rear plot were designed to avoid disturbance of these known archaeological deposits. An archaeological watching brief was set as a condition on planning permission (Application Number W/23381) in order to ensure that these proposed groundworks did not impact on both the known archaeological deposits and any pockets of unrecorded archaeological deposits that may survive at higher levels.

Mr Ceri Evans of Harold Metcalfe Partnership, on behalf of their clients, commissioned Dyfed Archaeological Trust Field Services (DAT-FS) to undertake the archaeological watching brief during groundworks at the site. This watching brief was undertaken on several occasions throughout July and August 2012.

The groundworks consisted of the removal of overburden across the south-eastern half of the plot, immediately behind the existing street frontage, to allow the construction of a concrete raft for a new extension to 131 Priory Street. The foundations for a new structure to be used as classrooms were excavated in the north-western half of the plot.

Three possible deposits of Roman origin were partially revealed by the groundworks immediately to the rear of the existing street frontage. Two of these deposits appear to correspond to remains recorded during the previous archaeological evaluation and interpreted as a demolition and soil layer. As each deposit was encountered ground reduction work ceased and the deposits were left in-situ, remaining relatively undisturbed. These remains probably represent the very upper archaeological levels of Roman date, associated with abandonment and decay of the Roman town. Better preserved remains of Roman date will probably lie preserved in-situ beneath these deposits (and the new buildings on top).

To the rear of the plot, groundworks revealed a thick deposit of mixed garden soils, some of which may be medieval in origin, but which largely appeared to be later post-medieval in date. This is associated with horticultural use of the land from the medieval period through to the 19th century.

The removed overburden across the site consisted largely of later post-medieval and modern soil layers, dumped deposits, demolition rubble and services. Some walls associated with late 19th century structures attached to the rear of the street frontage were revealed and disturbed, but these were not considered to of archaeological significance. No further deposits or features of archaeological significance were noted. The archaeological remains recorded during the previous archaeological evaluation remained largely undisturbed by the groundworks, which was the intention of the design of the development on the site.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project Commission

1.1.1 The development of an Islamic community centre at 131 Priory Street, Carmarthen (NGR SN 41603 20358) involved the conversion of an existing street-front property and the addition of new buildings the rear of the building within the plot boundary (Planning Application W/23381).

1.1.2 The site lies within the heart of the Roman town of Moridunum, and close to a section of the below-ground Roman remains that is protected as a Scheduled Ancient Monument (CM234). Previous excavation in this area had demonstrated the presence of well-preserved Roman remains of high significance. Due to the potential for significant archaeological remains to be present within this development area, the archaeological advisors to the local planning authority required a pre-determination archaeological evaluation to be undertaken to establish the survival and relative depths of archaeological deposits. This work was undertaken in February 2012 (Poucher 2012), the results of which informed the design scheme for the new buildings with the intention that subsequent foundation works would avoid archaeological deposits.

1.1.3 An archaeological watching brief was subsequently set as a condition on planning permission (Application No. W/23381) in order to ensure that the proposed groundworks for the development did not impact upon any of the significant Roman period features revealed during the archaeological evaluation (Poucher 2012). Although the design scheme had been created to avoid any significant archaeological remains, there were some areas where the anticipated thickness of remaining overburden may have been quite thin, and the possibility of pockets of archaeological deposits at higher levels remained. An archaeological watching brief would allow appropriate mitigation to be undertaken should sensitive archaeological remains be encountered.

1.1.4 A written scheme of investigation (WSI) was prepared by Dyfed Archaeological Trust Field Services prior to the works commencing, which was approved by the local planning authority prior to the works commencing.

1.1.5 Mr Ceri Evans, of Harold Metcalfe Partnership, on behalf of their clients, commissioned Dyfed Archaeological Trust Field Services (DAT-FS) to undertake the archaeological watching brief during groundworks at the site.

1.2 Scope of the Project

1.2.1 The project objectives as laid out in the WSI were:

- *To monitor groundworks in order to identify the presence/absence of any archaeological deposits.*
- *To establish the character, extent and date range for any archaeological deposits to be affected by the proposed groundworks.*
- *To appropriately investigate and record any archaeological deposits to be affected by the groundworks.*
- *To produce an archive and report of any results.*

1.2.2 Site visits were undertaken on 4/7/12, 6/7/12, 9/7/12, 16/7/12, 24/8/12, 29/8/12 and 30/8/12.

1.3 Report Outline

1.3.1 This report describes the location of the site along with its archaeological background before summarising the watching brief results and the conclusions based on those results.

1.4 Abbreviations

1.4.1 Sites recorded on the Regional Historic Environment Record¹ (HER) are identified by their Primary Record Number (PRN) and located by their National Grid Reference (NGR). Dyfed Archaeological Trust Field Services - DAT-FS; Written Scheme of Investigation - WSI

1.5 Illustrations

1.5.1 Record photographs are included at back of the report. Printed map extracts are not necessarily reproduced to their original scale and are illustrative only.

1.6 Timeline

1.6.1 The following timeline is used within this report to give date ranges for the various archaeological periods that may be mentioned within the text (Table 1).

Period	Approximate date	
Palaeolithic –	c.450,000 – 10,000 BC	Prehistoric
Mesolithic –	c. 10,000 – 4400 BC	
Neolithic –	c.4400 – 2300 BC	
Bronze Age –	c.2300 – 700 BC	
Iron Age –	c.700 BC – AD 43	
Roman (Romano-British) Period –	AD 43 – c. AD 410	Historic
Post-Roman / Early Medieval Period –	c. AD 410 – AD 1086	
Medieval Period –	1086 – 1536	
Post-Medieval Period –	1536 – 1899	
Modern –	20th century onwards	

Table 1: Archaeological and Historical Timeline for Wales

¹ Held and managed by Dyfed Archaeological Trust, Shire Hall, Llandeilo, Carmarthenshire, SA19 6AF.

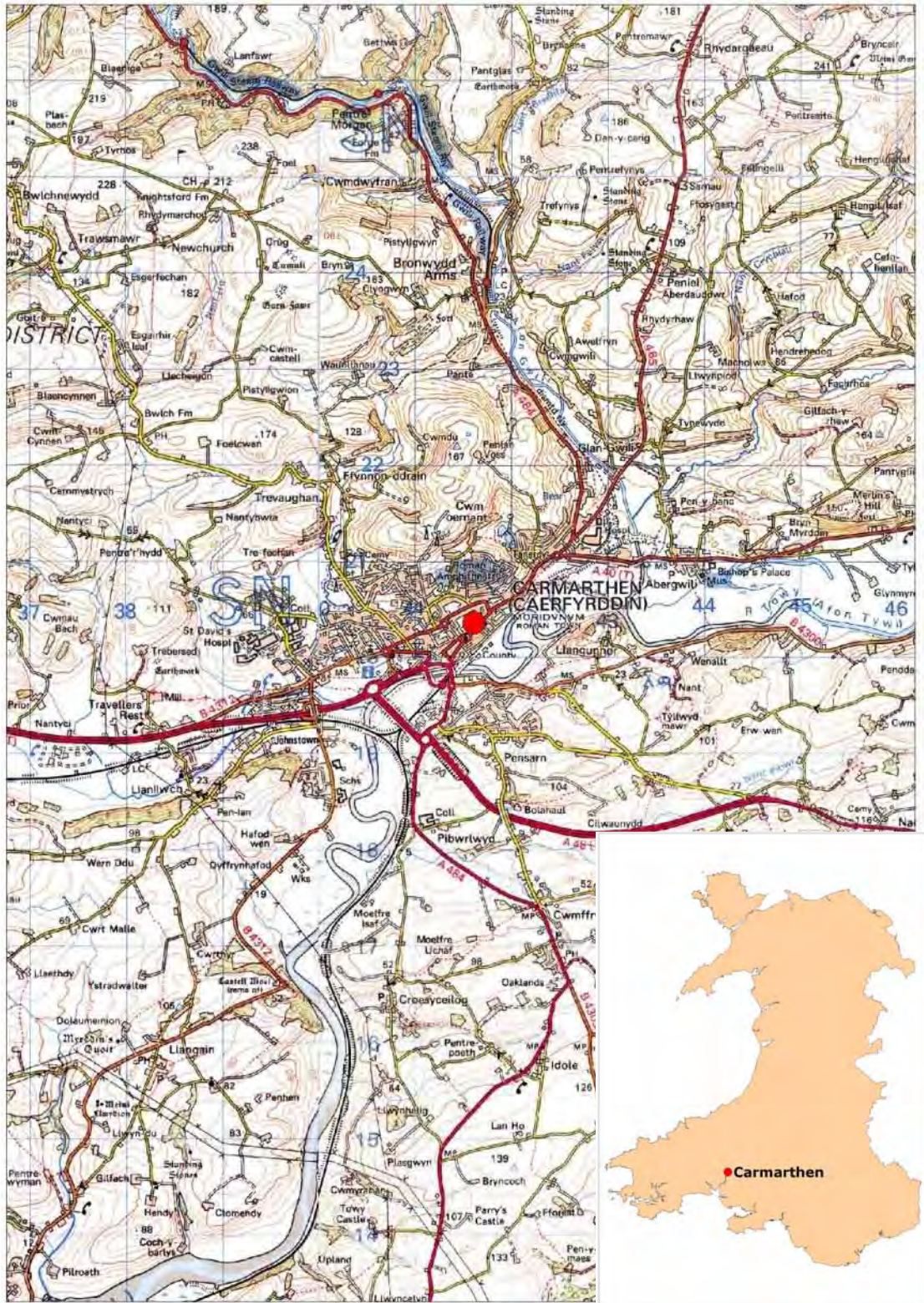


Figure 1: Location map based on the Ordnance Survey.

Reproduced from the 1987 Ordnance Survey 1:50,000 scale Landranger Map with the permission of The Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, © Crown Copyright Cambria Archaeology, The Shire Hall, Carmarthen Street, Llandeilo, Carmarthenshire SA19 6AF. Licence No AL51842A

2. THE SITE

2.1 Location and Topography

2.1.1 The proposed development site is located at NGR SN 41603 20358 within the town of Carmarthen. The site comprises the property (No.131) fronting Priory Street and the plot of land to the rear.

2.1.2 131 Priory Street is currently an empty brick-built property fronting Priory Street, formerly used as the club house to Carmarthen Town Football Club, whose ground stands to the rear. An attached building to the rear of the property has been demolished. This left a plot of land roughly 50m long and c.7m wide to the rear of the property. The land generally slopes gently down towards the street frontage. Immediately prior to the development work the plot consisted of rough open ground cleared of vegetation with the occasional area of hard-standing.

2.1.3 The Scheduled Ancient Monument (CM234), which comprises a large area of the Roman town, stands immediately to the northwest. The boundary of the Scheduled area runs along the boundary between the rear plot of 131 Priory Street and the football ground behind. The physical boundary between the football ground and 131 Priory Street was absent immediately prior to the development commencing.

2.1.4 The rear yard development area is bounded by 131 Priory Street to the south; the football ground to the north; by a breezeblock and brick wall with Bethania Chapel beyond to the northeast; and to the southwest the site is bounded partly by a formerly attached property fronting Priory Street with a breezeblock boundary wall behind. This property is currently used by Carmarthen Mind.

2.1.5 Underlying geology comprises sedimentary mudstones of the Didymograptus Bifidus Beds, overlaid by glaciofluvial sands and gravels.

2.2 Archaeological Background

2.2.1. The archaeological background to the site is described in detail in the evaluation report (Poucher 2012). In brief, settlement in Carmarthen appears to have its origins in the Roman period when a fort was established in the King Street/Spilman Street area in c.75 AD. Initial settlement appears to have concentrated around the western end of Priory Street, but by the AD150s streets and buildings were laid out along Priory Street as the town (Moredunum) was established. The outline of the Roman town can still be seen in the modern street layout.

2.2.2 Roman administration came to end in the early 5th century AD. Many Roman settlements were subsequently abandoned, although there is a suggestion that some form of settlement may have continued in Carmarthen, centred around the religious settlement of Llandeuldyddog, centred on Park Hinds/Old Priory Row. Llandeuldyddog is recorded from the 8th or 9th century, and was a well-established religious community and settlement spread along Priory Street by the time the Normans arrived in the early 12th century. The Normans established a new town around their castle in the Guildhall/Notts Square and Quay Street area, later extending it along King Street and Spilman Street.

2.2.3 Carmarthen became one of the largest towns in Wales, and remained so until the 18th century. Relatively detailed maps of Carmarthen exist from the late 18th century onwards. These show almost continual development along the northern side of Priory Street, including a building on the site of No. 131. Throughout much of the 19th century and into the 20th century No.131 was operating as a public house, known, certainly during much of the 20th century, as the Eagle. On the detailed 1:500 Ordnance Survey map of 1888 (Figure 3) the public house is shown, fronting Priory Street, but with extensive development in the plot to the rear. Much of this rear development had gone by the time the site was in use as the club house for the adjacent football club in more recent years.

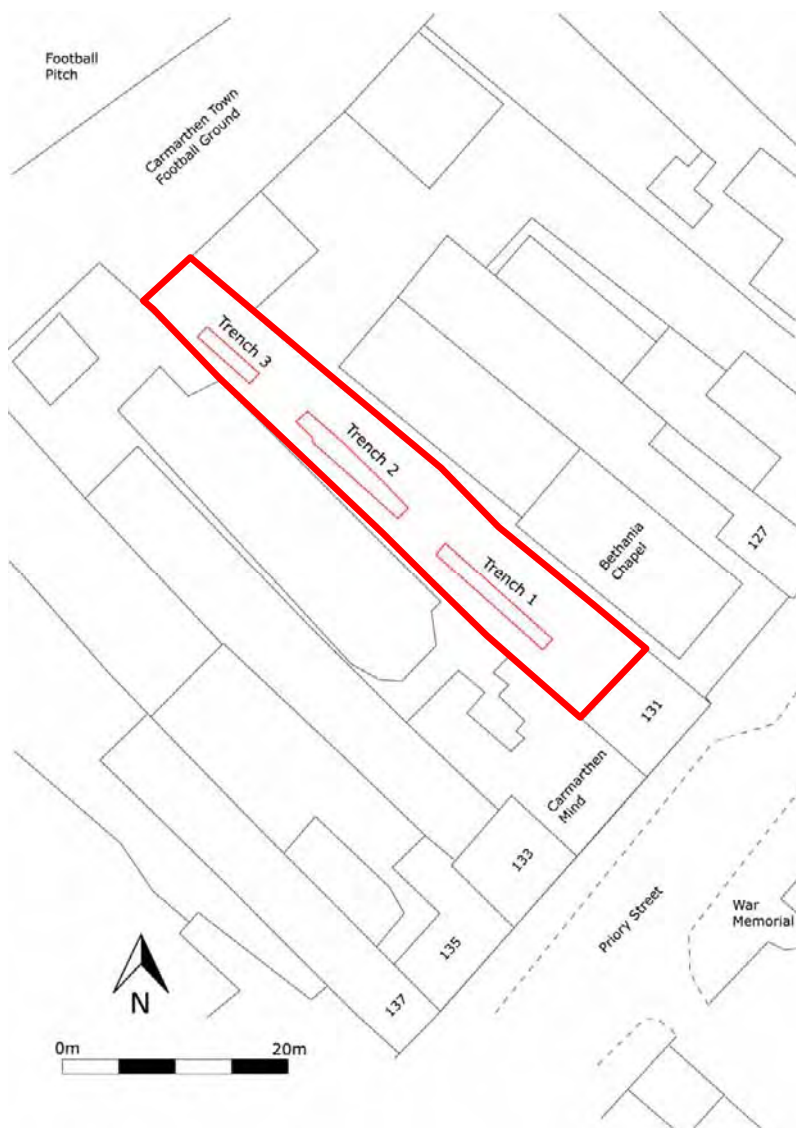


Figure 2: Location map of the site showing watching brief area outline in red and the three archaeological evaluation trenches

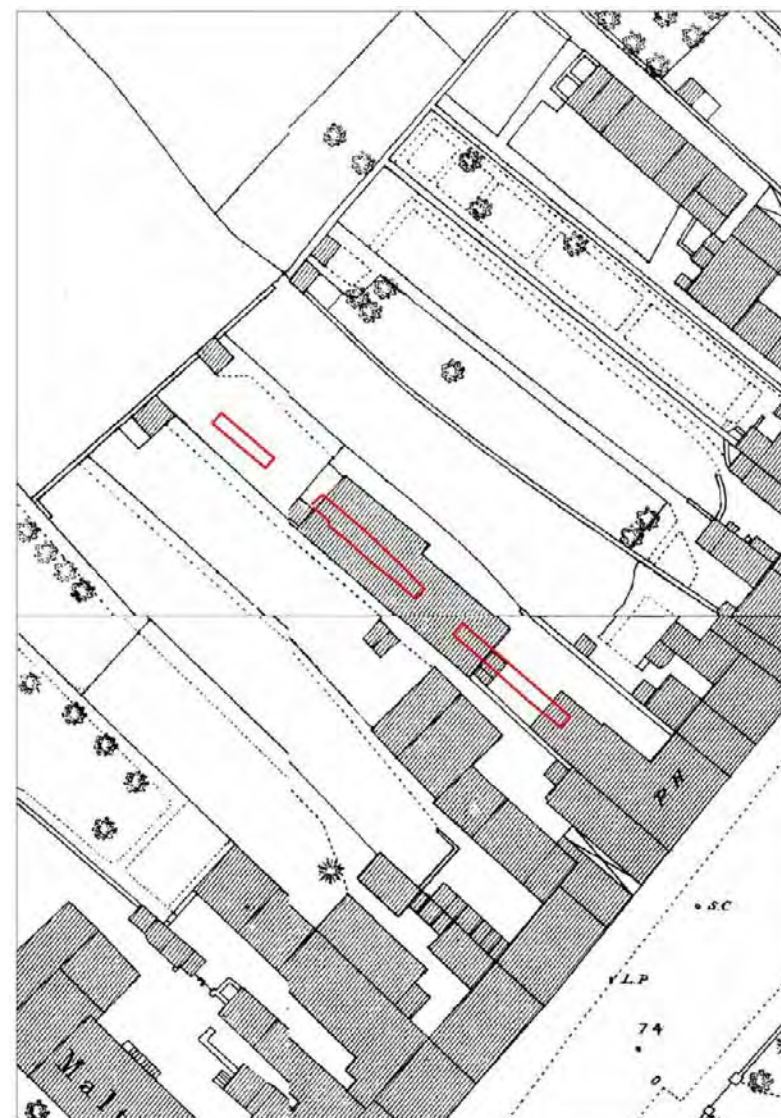


Figure 3: An extract from the Ordnance Survey 1:500 map of 1888, also showing the evaluation trenches (in red)

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 The relevant methodology for the watching brief was detailed in the WSI and included the overall premise of the watching brief:

In the light of the evaluation results, and following discussions with the archaeological advisor to Carmarthenshire County Council, an appropriate design scheme has been agreed which will ensure that the excavation depths of foundation groundworks will specifically avoid any impact on Roman period deposits within the development area. In some places towards the rear of the property, however, the anticipated thickness of remaining overburden may be quite thin. A watching brief has therefore been recommended to monitor groundworks to establish the 'formation level' for the foundations. If sensitive Roman deposits are encountered within the agreed excavation depth, mitigation will be undertaken.

3.2 Where mitigation was necessary the following methodology was laid out within the WSI:

The proposed 'watching brief' should be undertaken at the commencement of groundworks at the site that have the potential to expose, damage or destroy underlying archaeological remains. This will require the presence of an archaeologist during the excavation of all groundworks. Depending upon the results of this stage of the watching brief, further watching brief works may be required, including service installation etc.

The removal of all material from the site should be undertaken under constant archaeological supervision, with sufficient additional time allowed within the development timescales to ascertain the presence or absence of significant archaeological features and the excavation and recording of such features (on consultation with the curatorial officer if desired). The removal of this material must be carried out using a mechanical excavator using a toothless ditching/grading bucket.

Any archaeological features or deposits revealed during the groundworks will be examined and recorded to an appropriate level.

3.3 The groundworks consisted of the removal of overburden across the south-eastern half of the plot to allow the construction of a concrete raft. Ground levels were then stepped up and further foundations were excavated for additional buildings in the north-western half of the plot. The levels of the base of the foundations had been designed to avoid archaeological levels as defined during the previously archaeological evaluation. The excavation was undertaken using a JCB initially using a toothed bucket to remove the upper rubble-filled material, but then subsequently with a toothless grading bucket to reduce the ground to formation levels. The overburden was removed from site.

3.4 All groundworks down to formation levels were undertaken with an archaeologist in attendance. This work was carried out on the 4th, 6th, 9th and 16th July, and the 24th, 29th and 30th of August 2012.

4 ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF RESULTS

4.1 The proposed works were undertaken in two stages. Initially the foundations were excavated and laid for the building attached to the rear of the existing street-front property. Subsequently the foundations for a series of small classrooms to the rear were excavated.

4.2 The foundations excavated immediately behind the existing street-front property lowered the ground level by c.1m (1.3m below the planned final floor level), over an area 6m wide and extending 12m back from the rear of the existing building (Photos 1 - 7). At this point the south-western edge was brought in 1m to 1.7m and the foundations continued at the same level for a further 5m before being stepped up by c.0.3m (to 0.8m below ground levels) and continuing another c.9m back. This completed the area excavated for the concrete foundation raft for the proposed building lying immediately behind the existing street-front property (Photo 8).

4.3 The initial foundation design had a step up at 12m from the rear of the existing property, but due to poor quality soft ground this step was extended a further 5m back. As a consequence a patchy area of light yellow-brown sandy-clay was revealed within this extended area, at most 2.5m long and extending 1m into the area excavated (Photos 4 & 5). This deposit contained some fragments of mortar and Roman-period ceramic building material. This would appear to represent a continuation of deposit 107/119 as identified within Trench 1 of the archaeological evaluation (Poucher 2012). This had been interpreted as a layer of Roman demolition material. Upon its appearance the ground levels were not reduced any further. The north-eastern edge of this deposit was cut by Trench 1 of the evaluation itself. To the northeast of this was a series of later post-medieval dark grey-brown silty-clays.

4.4 Against the north-eastern edge of the excavated area (8m out from the rear of the existing property), a curving deposit 2.5m long and at most 1.9m wide, of light yellow-brown sandy-silty clay was revealed (Photo 6). This contained occasional fragments of what appeared to be Roman-period ceramic building material. At its easternmost extent were the fragmentary remains of what appeared to be stones set in a lime-mortar, of indeterminate date, but possibly archaeological. This deposit was heavily truncated by later post-medieval deposits.

4.5 At the north-western end of these initial foundation excavations the presumed Roman deposit (107/119) was overlaid by a mid brown silty-clay (first recorded 14.5m north of the rear of the existing property). This deposit became apparent spread across the full width of the excavated area immediately to the north of the Evaluation Trench 1. This deposit contained some Roman pottery fragments and ceramic building material and may therefore correspond to deposit 201 identified within Evaluation Trench 2, a possible Roman period soil layer. This was cut by two modern or late post-medieval service ditches. Again, once this deposit was revealed ground-levels were not reduced further.

4.6 The remaining deposits revealed were a mix of late post-medieval and modern soil and demolition layers, along with some sewage and service trenches. Fragments of presumed 19th century walls were revealed which were associated with the existing property. This included the remains of a cellar to the rear of the 131 Priory Street (Photos 2 and 7). It measured 6m by 4m, defined by a stone wall 0.5m wide, with the occasional brick, set in a lime mortar, and in-filled with brick and demolition rubble. On the north-eastern side the remains of another stone-built wall, set in a lime mortar with coal inclusions, was recorded extending from the existing property. This wall was 0.8m wide, c.8m long aligned SE – NW, parallel with the existing boundaries. This presumably represents part of the rear outbuildings visible on late 19th century map sources (Figure 3).

4.7 The initial foundation design for the classrooms to the rear comprised a similar concrete raft foundation. However, due to stability concerns with adjacent boundary walls that became apparent during the works, this design was altered to comprise a series of foundation trenches (Photos 9 – 11 and cover photo). These were excavated to a similar depth as had been proposed for the raft foundation. This work was only undertaken once the on-site archaeologist was satisfied that no archaeologically significant deposits were to be disturbed by this alteration in design. These foundation trenches were 0.7m wide, 0.8m deep and covered an area c.18m by 4.2m, 5m further to the northwest of the previous foundation excavations.

4.8 From the south-eastern corner of these classroom foundations, at the base of the excavation, was a deposit of light yellow-brown sandy-clay. This deposit was at most 0.8m wide and c.5m long. No finds or dateable material was recovered from this deposit. Overlying this deposit, and revealed throughout the rest of the foundation trenches, was a deposit of mid to dark grey-brown clayey-silt, that appeared to represent deep garden soils (Photos 9 – 11). A range of pottery was recovered from this deposit, largely post-medieval in date, with some late 19th or early 20th century fragments, but also including some possible medieval fragments. This deposit was occasionally cut by modern disused services.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The watching brief recorded three possible deposits of Roman origin in the rear yard area of 131 Priory Street. Two of these deposits appeared to correspond to remains identified during the previous archaeological evaluation and interpreted as a demolition layer and garden soil at the top of the sequence of Roman-period archaeological layers. The third deposit bore some similarity to the demolition layer. As each deposit was encountered ground reduction work ceased and the deposits were left *in-situ*, remaining relatively undisturbed.

5.2 Due to the limited nature of the works and the requirement to leave these remains as undisturbed as possible, detailed investigation of these layers was not undertaken. The fact that they appeared to represent demolition layers of Roman material, mixed with garden soils, suggests that they represent the very top of Roman archaeological layers. It is very likely that better preserved remains associated with Roman buildings and occupation of the Roman town of Moridunum in the later Roman period would lie buried beneath these layers. It is possible they represent the abandonment of the Roman town or further collapse and decay during the Early Medieval period. The layers are of low/moderate archaeological significance, and seal far more significant remains below.

5.3 To the rear of the development plot, a thick deposit of garden soils were revealed. Finds indicated that these garden soils could date from the medieval through to late post-medieval periods. No individual archaeological layers or features were identified.

5.4 It is known that the area to the north of the Priory Street frontage was used as agricultural land throughout the medieval and post-medieval periods. The early maps sources indicate that this area was separated into long thin plot boundaries, projecting back from the properties on the Priory Street frontage. The parcels of land were presumably associated with the corresponding street front property. Within the development site, the area remained mostly undeveloped, other than having buildings added directly to the rear of the building on the street front in the early 19th century. The constant use of this land for horticultural processes has resulted in this large build up of garden soils sealing the Roman remains beneath. These layers are of low archaeological significance.

5.5 The overburden (upper layers) removed from site consisted largely of later post-medieval garden soils and demolition rubble, along with modern dumped layers and service trenches. Remains of some 19th century walls relating to structures and a cellar formerly attached to the rear of the 131 Priory Street were disturbed, but they were considered to be of low or negligible archaeological significance. These walls are depicted on mid to late 19th century map sources.

5.6 The foundation design for the proposed structures to the rear of 131 Priory Street was developed to avoid the archaeologically significant Roman layers present across the site area. The watching brief condition was designed specifically to ensure that the groundworks would not expose, damage or destroy any significant archaeological remains. Where signs of possibly significant archaeological remains were identified, no deeper groundworks were undertaken.

5.7 The watching brief has been successful in ensuring that significant archaeological remains were not disturbed by the groundworks undertaken in advance of the proposed development of the rear yard of 131 Priory Street. The cooperation of the site contractors to ensure that this did not happen is gratefully acknowledged. Overall only three possible Roman demolition layers were exposed by the groundworks. These layers are likely to be the upper deposits of Roman archaeological remains indicated that better stratified and preserved Roman deposits would remain preserved *in-situ* beneath the new development.

6. SOURCES

6.1 Unpublished

Poucher, P., 2012 *131 Priory Street: Archaeological Evaluation.*
 DAT Report No 2012/16

PHOTOGRAPHS



Photo 1: General shot looking northwest during excavation of the foundation raft to the rear of the existing street-front property.



Photo 2: Excavated area to the rear of the street-front property. Cellar remains are visible in the top right.



Photo 3: Typical section through excavated deposits to the rear of the street frontage. 1m scale.



Photo 4: View, looking northwest, of the lighter sandy-clay archaeological deposit on the left. This appears to be a continuation of deposit 107/119 revealed and recorded during the archaeological evaluation (Poucher 2012). 1m scale



Photo 5: North-east facing section showing deposits overlying lighter archaeological layers 107/119. 1m scale.



Photo 6: South-west facing section showing the lighter yellow-brown archaeological deposit at the base revealed for a 2.5m long stretch along the north-eastern side of the excavated foundations. 1m scale.



Photo 7: South facing shot of the cellar remains. 1m scale.



Photo 8: Southeast facing shot of the completed foundation raft to the rear of the street frontage. 1m scale.



Photo 9: South-east facing shot of a typical section revealed by the foundation trenches for the rear classrooms, at the south-eastern end. 1m scale.



Photo 10: East facing shot of a typical section revealed by the foundation trenches mid way along. 1m scale.



Photo 11: North facing shot of the deepest section revealed at the north-western end of the foundation trenches for the rear classrooms. 1m scale.

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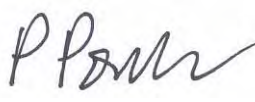
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Mae'r adroddiad hwn wedi ei gael yn gywir a derbyn sêl bendith
This report has been checked and approved by

ar ran Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Dyfed Cyf.
on behalf of Dyfed Archaeological Trust Ltd.

Swydd / Position:

Llofnod / Signature  .. Dyddiad / Date
17/12/12

*Yn unol â'n nôd i roddi gwasanaeth o ansawdd uchel, croesawn unrhyw sylwadau
sydd gennych ar gynnwys neu strwythur yr adroddiad hwn*

*As part of our desire to provide a quality service we would welcome any
comments you may have on the content or presentation of this report*

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